The Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Report/ Environmental Impact Statement

Mitigation History and Status

Information on mitigation history and status

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) continues to study ways to improve juvenile salmon passage through the hydropower system on the Snake River. As part of this effort the Corps released the Draft Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Statement (FR/EIS) in December 1999. These information sheets discuss specific topics covered in the FR/EIS. The entire FR/EIS can be found on line at http://www.nww.usace.army.mil. For more information contact Dave Dankel, Walla Walla District Corps, at (509) 527-7288, dave.a.dankel@nww01.usace.army.mil.

Mitigation History

The history and status of mitigation on the lower Snake River and other lands associated with the Lower Snake River Fish and Wildlife Compensation Plan (Comp Plan) must be taken into consideration when evaluating operational changes to the Snake River system. The Comp Plan was a negotiated mitigation settlement to compensate for fish and wildlife habitat lost with associated losses in hunting and fishing opportunities due to the construction of the Lower Snake River Project. Any changes to the existing system may impact the existing mitigation program.

The Comp Plan is divided into four programs: resident fish, anadromous fish, terrestrial wildlife habitat, and hunter and fisherman access. The initial goals of the Comp Plan are contained in: *Special Report: Lower Snake River Fish and Wildlife Compensation Plan-Lower Snake River, Washington and Idaho* (Corps, 1975a). The plan has since been modified to reflect updated goals.

The **anadromous fish mitigation program** was focused on hatchery rearing of fish stocks affected by construction and operation of the Lower Snake River Project. Hatcheries were constructed or modified in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho to produce various fish stocks for release in the Snake and Columbia rivers and tributaries. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) oversees the operation of these hatcheries.

The **resident fish mitigation program** was also initially based on a hatchery production program. This was altered somewhat in 1986 when focus shifted from constructing hatchery raceways to various stream restoration projects in southeast Washington by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Another aspect of this program is the purchase of lands adjacent to the tributaries of the Snake and Columbia rivers in southeastern Washington and western Idaho to develop public fishing access areas.

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The **terrestrial wildlife mitigation program** was divided into three distinct areas:

- **Development of project lands purchased as a part of the Lower Snake River Project.** The lands along the lower Snake River were developed to provide habitat for many game and non-game species, including mule deer, downy woodpecker, yellow warbler, river otter, ring-necked pheasant, California quail, Canada goose, mallard, western meadowlark, chukar partridge, and song sparrow. Fifty-four Habitat Management Units (HMU's) were identified along the Snake River from Ice Harbor Dam to the upper extent of the Lower Granite pool. Of the 54 HMU's 22 received some level of development. Of these 22, 10 HMU's were developed and maintained on an intensive level.
- **Acquisition of new lands and easements to provide public hunting opportunities for ring-necked pheasant and chukar partridge.** This land acquisition program has also gone through changes. In 1986, it was decided it was more cost effective to purchase lands outright rather than set up leases in perpetuity. Since 1987, more than 24,000 acres of land have been purchased or leased. Habitat developments and other facilities are currently being constructed on these lands.
- **Game Farm Alternative.** The third area of the wildlife mitigation program is a game farm to provide ring-necked pheasant releases on lower Snake River lands. The initial stocking program proved unsuccessful and led to the game farm alternative that began in 1989. The program funded WDFW to obtain easements/leases on private lands to develop ring-necked pheasant habitat, and to open most of these lands to the public for hunting. This program is scheduled to run through the year 2007.

Current Status

Most of the Comp Plan requirements have been met with regard to the purchase and construction of anadromous and resident fish hatcheries. The final stages of this program are currently being executed to turn these facilities over to the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

For the terrestrial program, the Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) is being used to measure habitat loss, as well as habitat needs to meet the goals of the Comp Plan for terrestrial wildlife. The initial HEP baseline and onsite analysis was performed in 1989 and 1990. These data were published in *Special Report: Lower Snake River Fish and Wildlife Compensation; Wildlife Habitat Compensation Evaluation for the Lower Snake River Project* (Sather-Blair et al., 1991).

Since 1991, most lands purchased for wildlife habitat and fisherman access have been evaluated. The data show that some habitats for listed species meet or exceed the mitigation goals set forth under the Comp Plan. Other habitat areas have not yet met the goals.

In recent years, mitigation has been reevaluated for the Columbia River hydropower projects. The NPPC has worked with the Corps and other agencies to consolidate fish and wildlife mitigation associated with the Federal hydropower facilities in the Columbia Basin.

Future Mitigation Requirements

Little or no change to the present mitigation program would occur under non-dam breaching alternatives, and the goals and objectives of the existing mitigation program would continue to be implemented as directed by Congress. If dam breaching is the preferred alternative, the area of current mitigation most affected would be the terrestrial wildlife habitat program. The present program would need to be re-evaluated, and possibly a new program would need to be implemented. The HEP evaluation of the current condition would give an estimate of the potential habitat loss after dam breaching. The existing developments would add some value for interim mitigation until the lower Snake River corridor re-establishes riparian vegetation. The HEP also gives an estimate of vegetation needed in the Snake River corridor to meet mitigation goals.

For details on LSR Mitigation History and Status, please see Technical Appendix L.